**Update from the Weir Meadow Working Group (WMWG) and Joint Projects Fund Raising Group (JPFRG)**

Since the last update (16th January 2023) one further meeting of the WMWG and JPFRG has taken place (13th February). This update covers the period from mid-January to the beginning of March (2023).

**National Lottery Community Fund and Woodland Trust**

A volunteer work party took place on the 25th February (thanks to everyone who took part). The aim of this was to clear some of the rough vegetation (mainly bramble) along the bank to Fordland Brook to provide better conditions for planting and tree establishment. The saplings from the Woodland Trust will be delivered sometime between the 7th and 17th March. A provisional planting session has been arranged (via the WhatsApp volunteer group) for the 25th March. If the saplings arrive at the beginning of this period (and well before the 25th) it may be possible to undertake a couple of small planting sessions on weekday evenings. A shout out via the WhatsApp group will be given if this is the case. We are unsure of the mix of trees that will be delivered and some may not be suitable for planting along the stream corridor (e.g. silver birch, rowan). There are other areas within Weir Meadow and potentially Oak Bank where a few trees could be planted, otherwise Stuart Brooking should be able to take the excess saplings for use elsewhere.

It was decided at the meeting on the 13th February that the rest of the planting (hedges, tree clumps within Weir Meadow) can be undertaken next winter using the National Lottery funding. This will enable us to be specific about the mix of species that we need to make up the hedges and landscaping elements.

**Football and Cricket Pitches**

Following on from previous correspondence with the Devon FA and Football Foundation (FF), Stuart Brooking was informed by Nicholas Garlick of Devon FA, that the Football Foundation are now offering grants up to £25,000 towards new grass pitches from “farmers’ fields”. Sport England are also offering grants up to £15,000 for creating pitches. We fit the bill well, but would more than likely need to commission and provide a specialist report setting out the proposed measures required to create the new football pitch. It is likely that such a report would cost in the region of £3-5k. Stuart Brooking is to have further discussion with the FF to discuss requirements for submitting an application.

Rich Cloke arranged for some small pits to be dug (via mini-excavator) to determine topsoil conditions across Weir Meadow. This was undertaken on the 25th February. The results will provide a clearer picture of the volume of topsoil that may be available and whether additional topsoil will need to be imported to undertake levelling and for seeding to establish the pitch surfaces. The information from this work will be needed when making any applications to potential funding bodies (i.e. FF / Sport England). Hopefully, with reporting on topsoil conditions in hand specifications and plans can then be drawn up to create the pitches and applications made (if deemed appropriate) for funding with a view to get the playing areas leveled and seeded this summer/autumn.

**Access arrangements**

Good use was made of the mini-excavator on the 25th Feb. In addition to the soil trial pits, a contoured path was excavated across the lower slope of Oak Bank. This will, hopefully, improve accessibility and also lead to a level area where a bench can be sited.

The original entry crossing into Weir Meadow (halfway between the weir and the current entrance) was also cleared. This work revealed a brick-dressed, stone arched bridge across the brook. The structural integrity of the bridge is not known. For now, a traffic cone has been put on top of the bridge to deter vehicles before a more permanent solution to preventing vehicles from using it is put in place (this is likely to involve the installation of two substantial posts 1 metre apart at the entrance, road side of the bridge).

**Fundraising and volunteering**

Plans for the Police Dog Hogan concert on 8th July are progressing. The PC has supported the plan, and will allow its bank account to be used and so enable VAT to be reclaimed. It was reported at the WMWG meeting that capacity at West Town Farm is only 270, not 500. Dave and Laura Farrow are helping pro bono with the booking, ticketing and practical and legal arrangements for the gig. Tickets will cost £25 with proceeds from the sales going to the orchard fund and sales from the bar, food and raffle towards Weir Meadow. Proceeds from a Fashion Show being organised for May 11th, by Nikki Rice and Janet Williams will be donated to the Weir Meadow fund.

Rich Cloke reported that the Cricket Club had donated £250 to WM fund from the Boxing Day duck race.

**Draft Management Plan**

A draft of a Management Plan for Weir Meadow and the Northern Fields has been produced (Richard Cottle) and circulated to the WMWG for comment. The plan covers proposed activities for the next two years (although it nominally covers a five year period). There are still significant gaps in proposals as much depends on initial feasibility work and funding to determine the best approach to developing the sports pitches. The Management Plan is being seen as a working document that can be updated on a regular basis and, as such, is likely to require changes / refining as activities are progressed / altered.

The next combined meeting of WMWG and JPFRG is scheduled for Monday 13th March 2023, 7:30pm.

From Richard Cottle, Chair WMWG – 7th March, 2023.